

* **Program Element:** Livelihood

* **Key Issues:** Nutrition-sensitive agriculture

Moving from Destitution to the Middle Class: ENGINE Shines the Light



It broke Adeziziu Kassa's heart when she had to pull her children out of class years back to help her with her arduous work as a daily laborer, but she simply couldn't afford to pay for the clothes and books they'd need to attend school.

"I was considered the poorest person in my community of 30 families," she explained. "But I promised them that as soon as I got some money, they'd go back." At the time, she had a young baby, who she'd tie to her back as she did her work, along with 7 and 11-year-olds, who helped her with her work as much as they could.

There was rarely enough to eat. Nearly every meal would be a simple meal of the sticky Ethiopian bread known as *injera*, plus a dollop of *shiro wat* – a paste made from ground beans; animal protein and

vegetables were a luxury she couldn't fathom. "My children's health wasn't ideal, and I myself struggled to do the hard tasks required of me as a laborer. I was constantly exhausted and had no energy."

Everything changed when she was selected to be a client of ENGINE, a USAID-funded program led by Save the Children that worked to improve the nutritional status of impoverished women like her of childbearing age, who were lactating or had children under two.

One of ENGINE's key levers was initiating nutrition-sensitive livelihoods efforts led by Land O'Lakes International Development. Through the provision of seeds for nutritious crops, simple tools, and livestock, Adezizu and others like her have learned how to grow, prepare and eat nutritious meals, growing enough to sell the excess for cash at local markets.

"ENGINE was like a light – it showed me the way to have a better life for myself," Adezizu explained with pride. With training, she established a permagarden – a small-scale, high-yield organic family garden – and began growing crops including Swiss chard, cabbage, kale, potatoes and carrots. She also learned to compost, address water management, and make fertilizer by mixing eggshells with charcoal, ash and dry compost.

Two months after getting her first seeds, she harvested some Swiss chard and kale. After ensuring the family had enough to eat, she sold the excess at the market, and immediately reenrolled her children back in school.

In the second year of the program, ENGINE provided her with 3 female goats and a ram. She learned how to care for them at one of the Ethiopian government's Farmer Training Centers, which partnered with ENGINE to demonstrate improved farming techniques, and she learned how to milk her livestock. "Drinking goat milk isn't common here, but I took the lead on being the first person in my group to begin drinking it and feeding it to my children."

As more vegetables in her permagarden matured, she not only continued to diversify the family diet, but also started turning farming into a viable business. When her carrots matured, she sold the excess for 1300 birr (US \$62), and used the proceeds to buy some grain and a donkey that would help her with transporting her crops to market.

She continued to expand her garden with potatoes and other crops, and began buying her own seed. At the next harvest, thanks to her new knowledge about crop seasonality and selling when prices were high, she was able to earn a whopping 10,000 birr (\$478) from selling her carrots. With that money in hand, and thanks to a loan provided by her Village Savings and Loan – community banking groups that Land O'Lakes established throughout ENGINE project areas – she was able to finally move out of the family's rented shack and construct her own home.

Meanwhile, her new goats began reproducing. Although she kept her original goat stock, she sold 5 kids to provide the 50 percent cost share that ENGINE required so that she could upgrade to having a cow. "I wanted to continue diversifying my livelihoods, and I wanted to get the extra milk for my family a cow would provide."

Today, Adezizu is no longer a domestic laborer, with her farming efforts provide enough food to feed her family nutritious meals regularly and to continue improving her life. "ENGINE forced me to change

my mindset, because I always felt that farming was for other people, not for me,” she explained. “But with a beautiful farm like this, I now feel like I should have people working for me, not the other way around!”

She had another baby after becoming an ENGINE client, and she says the extra nutrition has also done wonders for her young baby, noting that he is much healthier than her other children ever were. “He looks 3-4 years old even though he’s only an infant. This makes me proud.”

Not content to rest on her laurels, Adeziziu’s next plan is to invest in getting oxen, so that she can also plant grain. “I no longer wants to have to depend on anyone else for the food my family consumes.”

No longer tied to working outside the home as a daily laborer, she says she now has room to breathe. “I now have time to pass on my knowledge to my neighbors, and they’re starting to buy seed and start their own gardens, too.”

Adeziziu says she often has trouble believing just how much her life has changed since the ENGINE program started, and how much hope she has for the future. “I used to be truly destitute, but now I’m moving to the middle. I’m not poor anymore, and having the access, training and capacity I received gives me confidence that I will become even stronger.”

Save the Children is leading the implementation of ENGINE – USAID’s flagship multi-sector nutrition project, which aims to improve the nutritional status of Ethiopian women and children through sustainable, coordinated, and evidence-based interventions, enabling them to lead healthier and more productive lives.

The core initiative of this large-scale, five-year project (2011-2016) is to prevent under-nutrition during the first 1,000 days by focusing on social behavior change, including linkages to livelihood and economic opportunities.

ENGINE builds upon the Government of Ethiopia’s initiatives and renewed commitment to nutrition as well as the U.S. Government’s Global Health and Feed the Future initiatives.

ENGINE is implemented in 83 productive woredas in four regions of Ethiopia: Amhara, Tigray, SNNPR, and Oromia. ENGINE will benefit 3.1 million under-five children, half a million pregnant and lactating women, 3.2 million women of reproductive age, and 2.7 million households.

ENGINE is carried out by a consortium of organizations, with Save the Children as the prime in collaboration with Federal Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture and their decentralized health and agriculture systems. ENGINE works with universities, regional colleges, Feed the Future and health partners, and the Ethiopian Health and Nutrition Research Institute.

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